

For Immediate Release: June 17, 2020

Contact:

Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts
503.348.9612 | kelley@oregonlandtrusts.org



U.S. Senate Passes Landmark Conservation Bill

The Great American Outdoors Act clears the U.S. Senate, paving the way for passage in the House. The Act would fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, dedicating nearly \$1B annually to protect our Nation's special lands and waters.

Portland, OR—Today the United States Senate voted overwhelmingly to pass legislation to fully and permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and make critical investments in our National Parks and public lands. The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) passed the Senate by a vote of 73-25, and will now move on to the House of Representatives.

In Oregon, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has conserved everything from working private farms and forests to national treasures including the Pacific Crest Trail, Columbia River Gorge, John Day Fossil Beds, and Mount Hood. The program was permanently authorized in 2019, but there was no guarantee that the \$900 million put into the LWCF account every year would be spent on conservation. Historically, billions of dollars have been siphoned from the fund for other non-conservation purposes.

"Land Trusts across Oregon are celebrating the Senate's passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. We are grateful to Senators Wyden and Merkley for supporting the bill and for their ongoing efforts to fully fund LWCF," said Kelley Beamer, executive director for the [Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts](https://oregonlandtrusts.org) (COLT). "There is a long list of incredible conservation opportunities in Oregon that will benefit from full funding for LWCF- from a new trail network along Klamath Lake to a working forest on the North Coast. Full funding would give Oregonians more of what they are clamoring for: outdoor spaces that provide health and solace."

With enactment of LWCF 50 years ago, Congress made a promise to the American people to reinvest a small portion of proceeds from offshore oil and gas drilling into something of lasting value for all Americans – the conservation of our nation's natural, recreational and cultural resources. In Oregon, LWCF has invested over \$260 million to conserve some of our state's most defining areas such as Hells Canyon, Smith Rock State Park, Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, Cascade Siskiyou National Monument, Rogue River Wild and Scenic River, Lewis and Clark National Historic Park, and many more. In January of this year, the East Moraine of Wallowa Lake was permanently protected using nearly \$4M in grant funding from the LWCF.

"This watershed conservation legislation will protect Oregon's treasured places for generations to come. And it couldn't come at a better time with the economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency hitting our rural communities like a wrecking ball," **Senator Wyden said**. "The LWCF not only helps to get people outdoors and expand access to public lands, it has a proven track record of boosting the

Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

economies of the communities near those lands. It's the ultimate game plan for economic success in rural Oregon when you're talking about jobs and recreation around our natural wonders."

"Just as Oregon's shores, forests and deserts have long been woven into the spirit of our state and the vitality of our economy, America's incredible public lands have made invaluable contributions to every region of our country," said **Senator Merkley**. "It's our responsibility to be good stewards of those treasures, so that they can be enjoyed by future generations of hikers, hunters, fishermen, and other outdoor recreationists. I'm pleased that the Senate took an important step toward protecting Oregon's and America's great outdoor spaces by passing this legislation."

###

About the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts: <http://oregonlandtrusts.org/>

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) is a statewide coalition that works to serve and strengthen the land trust community of Oregon. Our coalition is comprised of 28 organizations that work with local communities to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, preserve open lands, maintain working farms, and retain social and economic values that make Oregon special. Collectively, COLT's member land trusts have permanently conserved more than 450,000 acres of land.

Attached photo: Arrowleaf balsamroot in bloom on Wallowa Lake's East Moraine. Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop.